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TAGS: [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: NSC SAMANTHA POWER'S UNHCR CONSULTATIONS ON IRAQ  
GENEVA 00000198 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Mark C. Storella, Charge d'Affaires, reasons 1.4 b, d

¶1. (C) Summary: UNHCR officials told NSC's Samantha Power that Government of Iraq and the UN itself are the biggest immediate obstacles to developing sustainable mechanisms to help Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees return and reintegrate inside Iraq. In the case of the GOI, UNHCR reps claimed that PM al-Maliki is uninterested in providing active support on refugee issues. As to the UN, an inability to make logistical/bureaucratic decisions that would permit an increase in the number of UN personnel in Iraq and movement outside the Green Zone is hindering humanitarian agencies from doing their work. Resettlement of Iraqi refugees to third countries is on track and, together with lower estimates of those requiring resettlement, most cases should be addressed within two years. UNHCR has had little luck raising funding from Gulf states and stated that most European countries have been hiding behind a "the U.S. created it, the U.S. pays for it" approach. UNHCR feels there might be some scope for attracting contributions from European donors for projects promoting sustainable returns as many European countries, who would like to send Iraqi asylees back to Iraq, will see this as in their direct interest. End Summary.

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Responsible Withdrawal: Addressing the Human Consequences  
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¶2. (C) NSC Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs Samantha Power met March 5 with UNHCR Director for Middle East and North Africa Radhouane Nouicer and Head of the Iraq Support Unit Andrew Harper. RMA Counselor was notetaker. Power explained that the U.S. is reviewing its approach to Iraqi refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the context of the planned U.S. military withdrawal by August 2010. The President is intent on making this a responsible withdrawal, addressing the human consequences of the decision. Therefore, the U.S. is pondering what actions need to be taken to ensure adequate support and protection for IDPs and refugees who choose to return home or settle permanently elsewhere in Iraq, as well as for refugees who decide to remain in neighboring countries for the time being. In addition, the U.S. supports maintaining a resettlement option for those who will never be able to return to Iraq. She welcomed UNHCR's views on both that broader picture and the role UNHCR could play during this process.

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Initial Hurdles: GOI and UN Bureaucratic Inaction  
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¶3. (C) Nouicer welcomed the new Administration's review. He stated that return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs in Iraq will be the crucial issue in the coming year. UNHCR is planning to increase staffing and activities within Iraq to assist the reintegration of returning refugees (see also para

6). Smooth and sustainable reintegration cannot happen without the active participation of the GOI. However, Nouicer claimed that the GOI is neither very interested nor cooperative on reintegration. He said that this was reaffirmed by a recent GOI decision not to approve additional funding to support returning refugees. Harper stated that PM al-Maliki is not opposed to refugee returns. In fact, al-Maliki wants them to come home, he said, but hopes they will return without the GOI having to provide support. According to Harper, that would prove that "al-Maliki won," and that the refugees never should have left in the first place. Nouicer stated that, even without active support, the least al-Maliki could do would be to name a competent Minister for Displacement and Migration.

14. (C) The UN itself constitutes the second "enemy" on returns and reintegration, according to Nouicer, as UN "paranoia" over security and an inability to take decisions is preventing UNHCR and other operational agencies from becoming active on the ground in Iraq. "It's time to move beyond August 19, 2003 and start doing our work again," Nouicer stated, referring to the date of the bombing of the UN headquarters in Iraq that killed UN Envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello and 21 others.

15. (C) Harper outlined the four logistical/bureaucratic areas that are limiting the UN's humanitarian action on the ground:

-- Transport/Logistics: Getting in and around Iraq is a problem. There is one UN plane (that breaks down often) serving the whole country. That means one Baghdad-Erbil flight and two Baghdad-Amman flights per week. UN personnel are still not permitted to fly Royal Jordanian Airlines, which many diplomats are now using. If this were a serious operation, according to Harper, there would be at least three

GENEVA 00000198 002.2 OF 003

planes and three helicopters serving the UN in Iraq.

-- Accommodations: There are 150 beds in approved accommodations for the whole UN, only 20 of which are available for the humanitarian operational organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, IOM). Security regulations require "overhead protection," but there currently is no UN plan to build additional housing to these specifications.

-- Office Space: UNHCR received money from Sweden for an office building, but has to build it as an annex to a school building which the UN is still using, despite the GOI allocating land for a new UN complex, because none of the other UN agencies appear interested in moving out of the school and into expanded office space.

-- Private Security: UNHCR currently must provide a 25-day notice to MNFI for escort outside the Green Zone and authorization is not always granted. This is untenable for an organization trying to run programs on the ground. Harper said that what UNHCR needs is a "low-profile," dedicated private security service to accompany UN personnel.

16. (C) Harper stated that 18 months ago the above elements were moot points as the overall security environment precluded a ramping up of UN operations. Now, with an improved security environment, the UN has only to make decisions to address the logistical/bureaucratic obstacles, but appears unwilling or unable to do so because it has "no vision, no strategy," according to Harper. For example, UNHCR has a plan to develop a network of offices in Baghdad where large numbers of returns are expected. Working with local NGOs and the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, the offices would collect information on returnee needs (social services, broken infrastructure, etc.) and match them to appropriate actors (GOI, World Bank, bilateral donors). This is crucial to making returns sustainable and encouraging further returns. UNHCR has identified increased international staff to manage this and other activities on

the ground. Some have already begun their assignments, but are waiting in Amman because they cannot move permanently to Iraq, according to Nouicer.

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Resettlement On Track  
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17. (C) Power asked the significance of UNHCR's recent reduction of the number of Iraqi refugees requiring resettlement from 86,000 to 60-65,000 and whether the current set-up for processing resettlement cases was adequate. Nouicer responded that the calculation was based on a more sophisticated understanding of the numbers of refugees in neighboring countries (probably no more than 250,000 in Jordan, he said) and their situations. If the U.S. takes another 20,000 or so in FY09 and other countries take up to 10,000, Nouicer felt the pipeline will continue to move and within a couple of years will have dealt with most of the potential candidates. He also did not preclude the possibility of the number needing resettlement decreasing again at some future point, depending on political and security developments in Iraq. (Comment: In a separate conversation, Harper told RMA Counselor that he had argued to lower the figure now to 50,000. End comment.)

18. (C) Nouicer mentioned that UNHCR would also soon revise its Iraq policy setting out the criteria for new status determinations. This will only affect new applicants and not those who have already received refugee status. The new policy will continue to provide prima facie status to applicants from the five central governates. Those from the south, however, will now be considered for refugee status on a case-by-case basis.

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In Search of Other Donors  
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19. (C) In response to Power's question on encouraging other donors to step up to the plate on Iraqi refugees, the UNHCR reps expressed clear frustration. High Commissioner Guterres has spent a lot of time in the Gulf in the past couple of years trying to encourage funding for Iraq and other UNHCR priorities. The result has been pathetic according to Harper. He said the Europeans have largely hidden behind a strategy of "the U.S. created it, the U.S. pays for it," though traditional European humanitarian donors (Nordics, Netherlands) have given some. Harper suggested that the only way to entice European contributions is to offer them something they want to pay for. He noted that the Nordics prefer community-based projects, for example. In addition, many European countries are now eager to see Iraqis that have been granted temporary protection go home. Thus, there is a

GENEVA 00000198 003.2 OF 003

preference among these countries to support activities inside Iraq and not in refugee host countries.

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Responsible Withdrawal  
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110. (C) Nouicer offered two other suggestions that would address the human consequences of a U.S. withdrawal. First, he said that tens of thousands of Iraqis who have worked for the U.S. will find themselves out of employment in an economy that is not producing many jobs. Developing livelihood projects to increase employment and develop skills would be an important gesture. Finally, he noted that Jordan and Syria have shown considerable goodwill in hosting refugees. As operations wrap up there, he believes it would be an important gesture to do something for the host communities or governments that is clearly in recognition of their hospitality.

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